

What is claimed is:

1        1. An electronic commerce apparatus for offering a  
2 promotional award to a visitor of an electronic commerce site,  
3 comprising:

4        a connection to a distributed communication network;

5        at least one promotional awards storage area, including a  
6 customer identifier storage and an award amount storage; and

7        an awards rule storage;

8        wherein said visitor is granted a promotional award upon  
9 visiting said electronic commerce site, said promotional award  
10 amount being controlled by an awards rule contained in said  
11 awards rule storage, and said promotional award amount being  
12 stored in said promotional awards storage area.

1        2. The electronic commerce apparatus of claim 1, said at  
2 least one promotional awards storage area further including a  
3 number of previous visits storage, wherein said visitor is given  
4 a promotional award upon visiting said electronic commerce site,  
5 with said promotional award amount being controlled in part by  
6 said awards rule contained in said awards rule storage and by a  
7 number of previous visits stored in said number of previous  
8 visits storage.

1           3. The electronic commerce apparatus of claim 1, wherein  
2 said at least one promotional awards storage area further  
3 includes an award time storage, wherein said visitor is granted a  
4 promotional award upon visiting said electronic commerce site,  
5 with said promotional award amount being controlled in part by an  
6 awards rule contained in said awards rule storage and by whether  
7 a predetermined time period has elapsed since a previous  
8 promotional award.

1           4. The electronic commerce apparatus of claim 1, wherein  
2 said award amount is cumulative over successive visits by said  
3 visitor.

1           5. The electronic commerce apparatus of claim 1, wherein  
2 said award amount rule contains a predetermined promotional award  
3 limit.

1           6. The electronic commerce apparatus of claim 1, wherein  
2 said award amount is zero if said visitor has previously made a  
3 purchase.

1           7. The electronic commerce apparatus of claim 1, wherein  
2 said promotional award according to said awards rule increases  
3 with successive visits by said visitor.

1           8. The electronic commerce apparatus of claim 1, wherein  
2 said promotional award is credited to a purchase price of a  
3 purchase by said customer.

1           9. The electronic commerce apparatus of claim 1, wherein  
2 said apparatus is connected through said connection to the  
3 Internet.

1           10. A method for offering a promotional award to a visitor  
2 to an electronic commerce site, comprising the steps of:

3           detecting a site visit by a visitor;

4           granting a promotional award to said visitor and storing  
5 said award in a memory storage area with associated visitor  
6 identification information; and

7           adding said promotional award to a pre-existing stored  
8 promotional award, if said site visit is not a first site visit  
9 by said visitor;

10          wherein said visitor is motivated to make multiple site  
11 visits and a purchase as a result of said promotional award.

1           11. The method of claim 10, wherein said promotional award  
2 increases with each site visit by said visitor.

1           12. The method of claim 10, wherein said promotional award  
2 increases incrementally with each site visit by said visitor.

1           13. The method of claim 10, wherein said promotional award  
2 is cumulative over successive site visits by said visitor.

1           14. The method of claim 10, wherein said promotional award  
2 is granted only to first-time purchasers.

1           15. The method of claim 10, wherein said promotional award  
2 is granted to said visitor if said visitor has not exceeded a  
3 predetermined promotional award limit.

1           16. The method of claim 10, wherein said promotional award  
2 is credited to a purchase price of a purchase by said visitor.

1           17. The method of claim 10, wherein said visitor must  
2 affirmatively select the promotional award.

1           18. The method of claim 10, wherein said electronic  
2 commerce site is accessed via the Internet.

1           19. A method for offering a promotional award to a visitor  
2 of an electronic commerce site, comprising the steps of:

3           detecting a site visit by a visitor;

4           determining whether said visitor has already exceeded a  
5 predetermined promotional award limit;

6           granting a promotional award to said visitor if said visitor  
7 has not exceeded said predetermined promotional award limit and  
8 storing said granted award in a memory storage area with  
9 associated visitor identification information; and

10          adding said promotional award to a pre-existing promotional  
11 award stored in said memory storage area, if said site visit is  
12 not a first site visit by said visitor;

13          wherein said visitor is motivated to make multiple site  
14 visits and a purchase as a result of said promotional award.

1           20. The method of claim 19, wherein an amount of said  
2 promotional award increases with each site visit by said visitor.

1           21. The method of claim 19, wherein an amount of said  
2 promotional award increases incrementally with each site visit by  
3 said visitor.

1           22. The method of claim 19, wherein said promotional ward  
2 is granted only to first-time purchasers.

1           23. The method of claim 19, wherein said visitor must  
2           affirmatively select the promotional award.

1           24. The method of claim 19, wherein said promotional award  
2           is credited to a purchase price if said visitor makes a purchase;

1           25. The method of claim 19, wherein said electronic  
2           commerce site is accessed via the Internet.